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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: promoting full employment and decent work for all

Statement submitted by International Council on Social Welfare, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 2006.

* E/CN.5/2007/1.

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Statement

I. Introduction

1. In 1995, world leaders gathered in Copenhagen for the United Nations World Summit for Social Development. They committed themselves to promoting full employment. Ten years after the commitment the number of people with no work reached its highest point ever and continues to rise to this day and the number of working poor was at the same level as 10 years earlier.

Jobless growth

2. Global unemployment is rising, despite the impressive growth in global gross domestic product (GDP). Economic growth is not translating into new jobs.

3. We are also concerned about the conditions of work of employed people. Of the over 2.8 billion workers in the world today, nearly 1.4 billion are under the US$2 a day poverty line. As many as 1995. Among these working poor, 550 million lived with their families on less than US$1 a day.

The social character of the crisis

4. 90 million of the 200 million jobless persons worldwide, are young people aged 15 to 24. Youth who can find work often face long working hours, short-term or informal contracts, low pay and little or no social protection.

5. Industrialized and developing countries are failing to increase employment opportunities for young people. The youth labour force participation rate declined from 59.3 to 54.4% between 1994 and 2004, mainly as a result of young people staying longer in education. The global unemployment rate among youth is 13.8%, up from 11.7% a decade earlier.

6. Child labour, especially its worst forms, is being reduced in many parts of the world. The number of child labourers has fallen by 11% or 28 million fewer than 2002. The sharpest decrease is in the area of hazardous work undertaken by children. There has been a 26% reduction overall and 33% fewer children between the ages of 5 and 14 are endangering their lives in hazardous work. One in seven of the world's children is in child labour.

7. Job opportunities for women are increasing. Some gender gaps in wages, treatment and opportunities in the workplace are shrinking. Women's education and entrepreneurship are rising. Yet gender discrimination still pervades the labour market. Women comprise 60% of the world's 550 million working poor. Women are more likely to earn less than men for the same type of work.

8. Women's contribution to household work exceeds that of men in almost all economies. Women are more likely than men to be involved in productive yet informal (and hence less visible and difficult to measure) activities including subsistence agriculture, family businesses and home-based work.

9. Today there are 191 million migrants, which include those migrating for employment, their dependants, refugees and asylum seekers. At 95 million, women constitute almost half of all international migrants.

10. Migrant workers send home to developing countries large volumes of remittances to support their families and communities. They contribute to the economic growth and prosperity in host countries. The US$250 billion sent home by migrant workers is more than all Official Development Assistance (ODA) and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Developing countries lose 10 to 30% of skilled workers and professionals through "brain drain".

11. Today's migrants face poor work conditions and discrimination. Migrant workers are in demand for low-paid, less skilled jobs in agriculture, cleaning and maintenance, construction, domestic service and health care.

12. Barriers exist to prevent potential migrants meeting the demand for foreign labour in host countries. This makes smuggling and trafficking of human beings highly profitable. About 10-15% of migration today involves migration under irregular situations, which leads to exploitation, forced labour and abuse of human rights.

13. Half the world's labour force is in the agricultural sector. Agricultural workers are among the poorest segments of society. Women account for over half of agricultural labour. Many children work in agriculture because their families cannot otherwise support them. It is estimated that 70% of the world's working children are involved in agriculture.

14. Highly-subsidized agricultural exports from the US and Europe unfairly undermine other producers.

15. When cheaper and highly subsidized agriculture imports come into the developing countries marginal farmers who have been cultivating these crops lose. Rural poverty forces many small farmers to migrate to cities for alternative work, adding to the social and infrastructure problems of cities.

16. Of the 40 million people worldwide infected with HIV/AIDS, 90% are in their productive and reproductive prime (ages 15-49) – people who are the mainstay of families, communities, enterprises and economies.

17. By 2020, HIV/AIDS is expected to cause a 10% to 30% reduction in the labour force in high-prevalence countries. There are deeper implications for the structure of families, the survival of communities and enterprises. There are longer-term issues of sustaining productive capacity.

18. The year 2006 is the 10th birthday of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative, the current scheme for international debt relief. In July 2005, the G8 agreed to cancel some of the debts of some of the poorest countries in the world. Relieved of debt payments coming into effect on 1 July 2006, some impoverished countries are able to release billions of dollars to spend on their own needs. The World Bank, the IMF and the African Development Fund will cancel debts to 19 countries that have met the requirements of the enhanced HIPC Initiative. Eleven other countries remain potentially eligible for debt relief under the initiative, but are kept out of the running by conflict, poor governance and arrears in payments. The HIPC scheme - even if it works - does not take into account poor middle-income countries, which also have severe debt burdens.

Indecent work

19. Workers' safety and health is a major concern. Each day, an average of 6,000 people die as a result of work-related accidents or diseases, totaling more than 2.2 million work-related deaths a year. Each year, workers suffer approximately 270 million occupational accidents that lead to absences from work for three days or more. Workers fall victim to some 160 million incidents of work-related disease.

20. Each year 100,000 people are killed by asbestos. The number is rising. Although global production of asbestos has fallen since the 1970s, increasing numbers of workers in the United States of America, Canada, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Germany and other industrialized countries are dying from past exposure.

21. Silicosis – a fatal lung disease caused by exposure to silica dust – affects tens of millions of workers around the world. In Latin America, 37% of miners have the disease, rising to 50% among miners aged over 50. In India, over 50% of slate pencil workers and 36% of stonecutters have silicosis.

22. In many countries minerals are extracted through the process of artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM). About 13 million people worldwide work in ASM and 100 million depend on it for their livelihood. Small-scale mineworkers face huge safety and health problems – including exposure to dust, mercury and other chemicals as well as poor ventilation, inadequate space and over exertion. Women who are paid less than men provide up to 50% of the small-scale mining workforce. Many children work in ASM. In Papua New Guinea children provide up to 30% of the small-scale mining workforce. China's small-scale coal mines, which employ roughly 2.5 million people, are among the world's most dangerous. Official statistics suggest that around 6,000 people die each year in these mines.

Decent work security

23. Social security is the protection that a society provides to individuals and households to ensure access to health care and to guarantee income security, particularly in cases of old age, unemployment, sickness, invalidity, work injury, maternity or loss of a breadwinner. Only 20% of the world's population has adequate social security coverage. Half lacks any kind of social security protection at all.

24. In addition, many people have insufficient coverage. In sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, only 5% to 10% of the working population has some social security coverage. In middle-income countries, social security coverage generally ranges from 20% to 60% of the population.

Policy directions – Economic growth is not enough

25. From the UN World Summit in 1995 to the ECOSOC Ministerial of 2006 the global community has made full and productive employment and decent work a central objective of national development policies. Economic growth, increased trade and production are only part of development success. Growth does not bring full employment and decent jobs. We must integrate the social with macroeconomic policies. We need convergence of investment, education, health, labour market, local

development and other policies to meet the challenge of reducing decent work imbalances and poverty.

26. At a micro level, cooperatives are well placed to mobilize social capital. Cooperatives can bridge the economic and the social by providing employment, an equitable distribution of profits and above all, social justice. The global cooperative movement directly provides productive self-employment for several hundred million worker-owners of production and services cooperatives, as well as the non-member employees of cooperative enterprises. In Europe, cooperatives provide employment to more than 5 million individuals.

27. Micro level solutions cannot replace macro level policies for long term solutions. The respect for and promotion of fundamental principles and rights at work is absolutely necessary. This includes freedom of association, the elimination of forced labour, child labour and discrimination in employment.

28. Social protection must be extended, particularly for workers in agriculture and the informal economy who are often not covered by labour legislation. Statutory social security systems for workers do not exist in many countries. Where they do, they often have very limited coverage. An ongoing problem is that labour regulations and policy, where they exist, are seldom enforced in developing countries and thus, fail to protect workers from jobs with low pay and poor working conditions.

29. On July 1st, 2003, the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families entered into force. The global challenge today is for all countries to formulate policies and mechanisms to regulate and manage labour migration and ensure that it contributes to the development of both home and host societies and to the well-being of migrants.

30. Reforms intended to open countries to world markets have stimulated productivity growth and better macroeconomic performance. This has been at the cost of destroying jobs and increasing informal employment. Increasing foreign competition forces firms to reduce labour costs by cutting workers' benefits, increasing temporary employment and subcontracting with establishments in the informal sector. All these factors explain why stronger growth is associated with growing informality and deteriorating labour market conditions. For many of the world's poorer countries, rapid globalization and trade liberalization have led to unfair competition, adverse terms of trade, job displacements and worsening employment prospects.

31. At its fortieth session, in 2002, the Commission for Social Development considered the priority theme "Integration of social and economic policy". Resolution 40/1 underscores the importance of recognizing the interdependence between social and economic policies and promotes their integration. The statement acknowledged the importance of broadening the scope of macroeconomic policy to integrate social and economic policy. Social development goals, however, require long-term frameworks while macroeconomic policy operates in a short-term time frame. Poverty reduction and social equity are long term goals whereas economic/financial goals (wages, inflation, interest rates, exchange rates, etc.) are short term.

Short-term growth does not ensure long-term livelihoods.